

RNZRSA Independent Review
Of the Effectiveness of the RSA Structure
REPORT OF THE REVIEWER

1. The Board of RNZRSA approved the Terms of Reference (copy attached) on 15 August 2018.
2. My process was to become familiar with the M & M and ITF reports, and from them to identify issues likely to arise. I attended meetings of the Forum and of the Board, and I separately talked with Board and Forum members, some more than once. The discussions were mostly but not all by telephone; those concerned were advised that their comments would be considered in my report but that identities would remain confidential; that is, no source for any remark would be identified or identifiable. The first two terms of reference are to review the reports; I do so in the context of their representing the then policy; the task is to determine if changes are needed in the light of experience over the past three years.
3. All those with whom I met or talked spoke freely and all were helpful in their comments. As it turned out, the structural issues were not uppermost in their minds; issues outside the direct scope of the TOR were repeatedly raised and I consider it in the interests of the organization to report on these. (Paragraph 12 below) Interestingly, there were no solo ideas, all comments were reiterated in varying degrees by at least one other person. There is no doubt that a large majority find present arrangements to be working but needing time for development.

The Structure

4. No one who I interviewed suggested that any better structure could or should at this time be adopted; no proposals for substantive change were put forward, there was a suggestion of integration of the Forum and Board. The general and almost universal theme was that the new structure, with the creation and operation of the Board and Forum, is a success. Equally, it is a work in progress and needs more time to develop its processes and win full acceptance by the wider organization. This involves establishment of mutual trust and support on all sides; which is not yet fully the case. The structure, as embodied in the new constitution up for adoption at the October National Council, does provide for modern separation of powers; especially for the organization to have that expertise in governance generally regarded today as essential to large organizations and particularly so for one as complex and diverse as this. There is scope for greater co-operation and understanding between the Forum and the Board.

The Board

5. The Board is composed of directors with varying degrees of direct experience of RSA work. Those with lesser RSA relationship bring needed expertise in their fields. It is balanced by gender. It has robust debates; it is greatly to the members' credit that formal votes have never needed to be taken and all decisions have been able to be reached by consensus. To manage such a body in this way requires real skills of chairmanship and the directors acknowledge the present Chair in that regard. I note that the National President has, in line with the ITF report, speaking but not voting rights; the Board's charter was amended at its wish to require the directors to recognise the special position of the NP, and to give his views due weight. This arrangement appears to me to be working well.
6. The consensus is in itself is a major achievement. Others are evident. Much work has been put into reviewing financial management, aims and aspirations. This, as with almost all else, is a work in progress. The financial report to National Council will speak for itself.
7. The Board's strategies are outlined by the Chair in his annual reports. Given that the overriding aim of the organization is veteran support, this has been enhanced and its processes improved. This has been made possible by the improved financial arrangements. The Trust consolidation is a major achievement. Training facilities for the wider membership are important and should be developed.
8. Overall, the Board is seen as having the needed skills. It is efficient in its operational aspects. Its effectiveness is increasing, but in the long run is dependent on its acceptance. It is a work in progress; it is clearly capable of greatly enhancing the objects of the organization; it must thereby earn its respect and acceptance. There is a minority view that it is too large in numbers and meets too often; thereby getting over-involved in management. I note the rules provide for a membership of 5 to 8; it is presently 6 and will be 5 after its 2018 AGM. The work load is substantial; the Audit Committee needs expert manning. I would see 5 as a minimum. Attention needs to be paid to the differentiation between governance and management functions.

The Forum

9. The Forum has an elected membership. It is not balanced as to gender. It has seen its role change to some extent. The loss of involvement in finances is felt in varying degrees. It has however been concentrating on relationships with members and there is a strong feeling of improvement in that respect. Iwi and Pacifica membership is courted. Remembrance issues, particularly post-Vietnam, are being worked on with considerable success. There is a strong appreciation of the need for younger membership. Overall I perceive the Forum as being in a healthy state with progressive ideas. However, compliance by many clubs with the rules, particularly in respect of

returns to Head Office and payments of capitation, remain of concern and these are a responsibility of the Forum, as well as the Board. Like the position of the National President on the Board, the Chairman has attendance and speaking, but not voting, rights. This is a valuable liaison between the two bodies.

Board/Forum

10. There is real benefit to be derived by further developing this relationship. The two strategy meetings have been a good start; and should be continued. The separation of the Board's functions is felt by some Forum members to cause lack of awareness resulting in turn to their being unable to report fully downwards. More financial information to the Forum, and more knowledge to the Board of Forum steps being taken at grassroots level would result in improved relations on both sides. The suggestions of joint meetings; so as to make each body more aware of what the other is doing, should be explored.
11. Relationships with other organizations, from Minister/CDF to local institutions engaged with welfare issues are a major function shared by both bodies. Representation is the field of the Forum, particular responsibility lying with the National President. But the organization has many business and professional relationships, and these are for the Board. Overlap can assist in mutual understanding and should be encouraged.

A Project

12. There is universal concern about the effect of the aging process on the organization, coupled with the need to increase younger membership. All to whom I spoke mentioned it. The key word here is relevance. To survive at all the organization needs to demonstrate relevance to the community and to recognize and meet the needs of those whom its existence is designed to support. The obvious source of new membership is NZDF personnel, either when still serving or at the latest on discharge. The decline in mess life in the services as more members live off or away from bases presents an opportunity for clubs. They need to present themselves to individuals who often are making new lives for themselves in communities new to them. The process has already started with E-membership. These issues present as uppermost in very many if not all minds. The Forum is working on these issues. But I suggest that a specific project be developed between the Board and the Forum to work together on these issues at all levels from Minister/CDF to local RSAs. The primary aim is the ensure the survival of the organization, the secondary one is the improvement of mutual understanding and co-operation between the two governing bodies most concerned.

Summary

13. The issues identified in the M&M report leading to the adoption of the ITF report have resulted in an improved structure which has general acceptance. It would be a seriously retrograde step to retreat to the previous structure or to substantially amend the present arrangements; at least until they have been given a full chance to settle into smoothly working systems. Its success is dependent on mutual cooperation, which inevitably attracts personality issues. Members have the ability either to resolve these or put them aside for the sake of the whole.
14. The work involves continuous improvement; participants see this as occurring.
15. People are doing their best, but more time is needed.
16. Reverting to previous formats would be so counter-productive as to be damaging to the organisation, both practically and to its reputation and standing in the community.
17. More awareness between Forum and Board would improve the effectiveness of both; and is to be encouraged.
18. Finally, the organization is comprised of people working sincerely for its benefit and the achievement of its aims in respect of members and veterans. While this fortunate state continues, and self-seeking remains in abeyance, it can continue in good heart.

"C. J. Hodson"

CHRISTOPHER JOHN HODSON ED*, QC

Independent Reviewer

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